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ABSTRACT

Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism frequently occurring among human services professionals. Education is one profession whose members are particularly susceptible to burnout. There is a need to identify causes of burnout and possible ameliorative strategies, as perceived by teachers. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), a measure of the burnout syndrome consisting of three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment), was administered to 101 high school teachers. Teachers also answered questions on demographics, the teaching profession, perceived causes of burnout, and ways to decrease burnout. The results indicated no significant relationship between demographic characteristics and scores on the MBI subscales. Attitudes about leaving the teaching profession were significantly related to all three subscales, and length of employment correlated negatively with how often teachers thought of leaving the profession. The five most frequently cited causes of burnout were lack of administrative support, lack of parental and community support, workload, low student motivation, and discipline problems. Developing a positive relationship with the administration, decreasing teacher workload, receiving more parental and community support, and developing effective disciplinary procedures were the most frequently suggested strategies for decreasing burnout. (The survey used in the study is appended). (NRB)

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FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER BURNOUT

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Running Head: Teacher Burnout

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Abstract

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was administered to 101 high school teachers. Relationships were assessed between MBI subscale scores and demographic characteristics, MBI subscale scores and teachers' attitudes about the profession, and demographic characteristics and teachers' attitudes about the profession. Demographic characteristics alone are not accurate predictors of burnout. However, burnout might predict who will leave the teaching profession.

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Factors Influencing Teacher Burrout

"Burnout" is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, and frequently occurs among individuals who work directly with people (Maslach, 1976, 1978; Maslach & Jackson, 1981a, 1981b; Pines & Maslach, 1980). Truch (1980) has reasoned that professionals who work with people are particularly susceptible to burnout, because responsibility for people is more stressful than responsibility for things. The symptoms of burnout have been well documented and include constant fatigue, insomnia, frustration, and depression (Freudenberger, 1974, 1975; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Maslach, 1976; Maslach & Jackson, 1981a, 1981b; Truch, 1980). Other physical symptoms include lingering colds, headaches, and gastrointestinal disturbances (Freudenberger, 1974, 1975; Maslach, 1976).

Research on burnout has focused on human service professionals. Burnout often occurs when the professional is forced to care for too many people (Maslach, 1976, Maslach & Jackson, 1981a, 1981b; Pines & Maslach, 1980). Education is one profession whose members are highly susceptible to burnout. Teachers often have to face over 150 students each day, attempting to gain and hold their attention in a manner that is conducive to learning. This is not an easy task considering the diversity of the students. Many students are on a variety of different academic and behavioral levels. Some students are enthusiastic and willing to learn, some are not motivated, while others are disruptive. Along with the problems and attitudes of the students, teachers also have to deal with the school administration, parents, the

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community, and the scrutiny given to them by the public and media for the apparent decline in student achievement in recent years. Therefore, teaching has become a highly stressful occupation.

Walsh (1979) has reported that a Chicago teachers' union stress survey found 57% of 5,500 teachers responding claimed physical and/or mental illness as a result of their job. Of 257 teachers sampled in England, 20% reported teaching as either very stressful or extremely stressful (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978) Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) have defined "teacher stress" as a "response syndrome of negative affects (such as anger or depression) resulting from the teacher's job." As in other professions that continuously deal directly with people, the chronic stress of teaching can be emotionally draining and poses the risk of burnout (Maslach, 1978; Maslach & Jackson, 1981a, 1981b). Besides the constant direct contact with people, Cunningham (1981) has reported that teacher burnout may also occur when the job becomes routine and unchallenging.

Truch (1980) has reported that teachers are leaving their profession at an accelerated pace. Younger teachers are leaving within their first five years of teaching. This supports Maslach and Jackson (1981b) who has pointed out that burnout is likely to occur within the first few years of one's career, and that burnout is linked to job turnover. However, Truch also reports that older teachers are retiring earlier, and others claim that they would not be teachers if they had the chance to do it again. This has led the authors to speculate that the length of time that teachers remain in the profession may be a factor that influences burnout.

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The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981a) is a frequently used measure of the burnout syndrome. The MBI consists of three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. Each subscale measures separate aspects of burnout. The Emotional Exhaustion subscale assesses feelings of being emotionally drained. As emotional energies are drained, people are no longer able to give of themselves as they once had. The Depersonalization subscale assesses the development of negative, cynical attitudes and feelings toward the people with whom one works. The Personal Accomplishment subscale measures feelings of competence and success in working with people. When people feel they are no longer accomplishing what they want, or making a meaningful contribution through their work, they evaluate themselves negatively. Higher scores on the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization subscales, and lower scores on the Personal Accomplishment subscale reflect a higher degree of burnout. It is important to note that burnout is viewed along a continuum, ranging from low to moderate to high levels of burnout, rather than employing a dichotomous cut-off of "burned out" or "not burned out" (Maslach & Jackson, 1981a). Iwanicki and Schwab (1981) have assessed the reliability and validity of the MBI with teachers and concluded that its use with teachers is appropriate.

Schwab and Iwanicki (1982) and Maslach and Jackson (1981a) have found significant relationships between demographic characteristics and MBI subscale scores. In their study of 469 teachers, Schwab and Iwanicki found that sex and age were significantly related to one or more MBI subscale scores. In their

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research, teachers in the 20-to 39-year-old category scored higher on the Emotional Exhaustion subscale than their 50-year and older counterparts. Schwab and Iwanicki also found that males scored higher than females on the Depersonalization subscale.

In Maslach and Jackson's (1981a) normative data, there were significant relationships between the demographic characteristics of sex, age, and education level, and the MBI subscales. Maslach and Jackson found that females scored higher than males on both the Emotional Exhaustion and Personal Accomplishment subscales. Males scored higher than females on the Depersonalization subscale.

Maslach and Jackson also found that younger people (i.e., 30 and under) scored higher than older people, both on the Depersonalization and Emotional Exhaustion subscales. The oldest age group (i.e., 51 and over) scored higher on the Personal Accomplishment subscale than any other age group.

On the Emotional Exhaustion subscale, Maslach and Jackson found that postgraduates scored the highest, followed by those who had completed college, then by those who had no college experience, and finally by those who had some college experience. On the Depersonalization subscale, those who had completed college scored the highest, followed by those who had done postgraduate work, then by those who had completed some college coursework, and finally by those who had no college experience. On the Personal Accomplishment subscale, people who had some college experience scored the highest, followed by those who had no college experience, then by postgraduates, and finally by those who had completed college.

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The aim of the current study was to assess the relationships between demographic characteristics and MBI subscale scores, teachers' attitudes about the profession and MBI subscale scores, and demographic characteristics and teachers' attitudes about the profession. Investigations of factors that are associated with burnout provide clues to what causes it (Maslach & Jackson, 1981a). However, little research to date has attempted to directly identify the causes. Maslach (1976, 1978) suggests that many causes of burnout are located in social and situational factors. Other research (Gann, 1979; Heckman, 1980; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978) indicates that the causes are found in personality characteristics. Schwab (1983) suggests that factors leading to burnout may be both individual personality characteristics, and/or situational factors. The current study also sought to identify causes of burnout and possible ameliorative strategies, as perceived by teachers.

Method

Subjects. A total of 101 high school teachers participated as subjects in this study. Subjects were drawn from four suburban public high schools in northwest Ohio. The student enrollment of these schools ranged from 1,000 to 1,284, with a mean of 1,140. Fifty-two percent of the sample were males, and 48% were females. The age of the subjects ranged from 23 to 58 years, with a mean of 38, and a median of 37. Teaching experience of these subjects ranged from one to 30 years, with a mean of 13, and a median of 12. Among the subjects, 59% had completed their Bachelor's degree, and 41% had completed their Master's degree. English teachers made up

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19% of the sample, Social Studies, 12%; Math, 11%; Science, 11%; Business, 10%; Physical Education, 6%; and Special Education, 4%. The remaining 27% fell into the category of "other" or were missing variables.

Materials. The MBI is a 22-item questionnaire consisting of three subscales (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment), each scored by dimensions of frequency and intensity. The frequency dimension ranges from 0 = "never" to 6 = "everyday". The intensity dimension ranges from 0 = "never" to 7 = "major, very strong". Only the frequency dimension was used in this study, because Iwanicki and Schwab (1981) found fairly high correlations between the frequency and intensity dimensions across subscales when the MBI was used with teachers. Their correlations varied form .75 to .94, with a mean of .87. They suggest the use of only one dimension to reduce administration time. When the MBI is used with teachers, a slight modification is made in the items. The term "student" is used in place of the term "recipient".

Along with the MBI, demographic questions, questions on attitudes about the teaching profession, questions on the perceived causes of burnout, and questions on what might be done to decrease burnout were included in the questionnaire that was used (see Appendix A).

Procedure. After obtaining permission from the appropriate school officials (e.g. principals), questionnaires were distributed to the teachers via their school mail boxes, or school officials. In order to insure confidentiality, the teachers were provided with envelopes, in which to seal their completed questionnaires. The teachers were given three days to respond, after which one of the

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authors returned to the schools to collect the completed questionnaires. A total of 191 questionnaires were distributed and 101 were returned, a return rate of 53%.

Results and Discussion

The MBI subscale scores were computed according to the directions in the MBI manual. The means of this samle for the three subscales were as follows: Emotional Exhaustion: $\underline{M}$=18.16 ($\underline{SD}$=10.17), Depersonalization: $\underline{M}$=8.46 ($\underline{SD}$=5.16), and Personal Accomplishment: $\underline{M}$=35.8 ($\underline{SD}$=7.27). All of these means fall within the moderate (middle third) range of experienced burnout, as defined by Maslach and Jackson (1981a).

Demographic Characteristics and MBI Subscale Scores

No significant relationships were found between the demographic characteristics of age, sex, education level, experience, and department, and scores on the MBI subscales. This finding supports Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) who found no significant relationships between these demographic characteristics and self-reported teacher stress in their study of 257 secondary teachers in England. These findings however, do not support the findings of Schwab and Iwanicki (1982) and Maslach and Jackson (1981a) that are mentioned above. In their study of 469 teachers, Schwab and Iwanicki found that sex and age were significantly related to one or more MBI subscale scores. The differences between the current study and Schwab and Iwanicki's study may be due to the differences in sample size. In addition, Schwab and Iwanicki's

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study included elementary through high school teachers, while the current study was limited to high school teachers only.

In Maslach and Jackson's sample of 1025 people in health and service occupations, sex, age, and education level were significantly related to one or more MBI subscale scores. The differences between the current study's results and those of Maslach and Jackson, may be due mainly to the differences in the samples. Although Maslach and Jackson's study did include teachers, it also included other professions, such as police officers, counselors, nurses, physicians, attorneys, agency administrators, probation officers, mental health workers, social workers, and psychologists. Other reasons for the differences may be due to the large difference in sample size and/or range restrictons. The age range in Maslach and Jackson's study was 18 to 70 years, while the age range for the current study was 23 to 58 years. Maslach and Jackson's sample included people whose education level ranged from people who had not completed college to people who had done postgraduate work. All of the subjects in the current study had either a Bachelor's or a Master's degree.

Attitudes and MBI subscale scores

Attitudes about leaving the teaching profession were significantly related to all three MBI subscale scores. Correlations are reported in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here.

These correlations should be interpreted cautiously, because each correlation was based on teachers' response to one question.

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However, since all three questions reflect teachers' attitudes about leaving the profession, and since the correlations are similar, it appears that all three questions are tarping the same construct (i.e., intent to leave the profession).

Within this sample, 60% of the teachers reported that they have seriously considered leaving teaching, and 50% said that they would leave if they had a suitable job to replace theirs. These are amazing percentages. If that many teachers are unhappy with their job, it is our guess that it has an affect on their teaching performance, on and their students.

The willingness to leave the profession is reflected in the following statement by a teacher in this sample: "I have merely accepted the fact that teaching cannot be a rewarding profession for me and I will get out at the first opportunity." For those teachers who responded that they had seriously considered leaving the professiopn, 22% said they have not left yet because of financial reasons, and 20% said they have not left because they like teaching. Other reasons for staying in the profession include the following: 1)the flexible schedule (summers off, breaks, etc.,), 2)too much retirement time built up to make leaving worthwhile, and 3)teaching skills are not transferrable to business and industry. For all of the teachers in the sample, the mean response for how often they thought of leaving the profession was "once a month".

Teachers' reports of negative feelings about their job correlated .35 with thoughts of leaving the profession, and .41 with how often teachers thougt of leaving. Teachers' reports of negative feelings about their job also correlated .43 with the

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Emotional Exhaustion subscale, .39 with the Depersonalization subscale, and -.30 with the Personal Accomplishment subscale. All of these correlations were significant at the $p < .001$ level and are in the expected direction. That is, since attitudes toward leaving the profession were related to MBI subscale scores, both attitudes toward leaving the profession and MBI subscale scores would be related to teachers having negative feelings about their job.

Demographic Characteristics and Attitudes

Length of employment correlated negatively (-.36) with how often teachers thought of leaving the profession. This finding supports Maslach and Jackson (1981b) who has pointed out that burnout is likely to occur within the first few years of one's career, and that burnout is linked to job turnover. This finding suggests that experience alone may not result in burnout, or that other factors may help teachers deal with stress in their job. For example, a large proportion of the sample (90%) reported having negative feelings about their job at times, but the overwhelming majority (95%) reported talking about these feelings with their colleagues. This sharing may contribute to a reduction in feelings of burnout. This is consistent with Maslach (1976) who found that burnout rates are lower for those who express and share their feelings with colleagues.

Of those who did report having negative feelings about their job, 93% denied feeling "bad" for having negative feelings. This may be because 100% of the teachers believed that their colleagues experienced the same feelings. The idea that others have similar feelings may be a factor in helping teachers deal with stress.

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This finding however, contrasts with Maslach (1976) who found that many of her subjects did not know that their co-workers felt the same way. Rather, in many cases, workers felt that they were "bad" persons because they had such feelings (Maslach, 1978; Pines & Maslach, 1980).

No other significant relationships were found between demographic characteristics and attitudes about the teaching profession.

Perceived Causes of Burnout and Ameliorative Strategies

When asked to describe what the term "teacher burnout" means, one teacher's response was: "The realization that what you are doing doesn't really matter in the lives of the students. Teacher burnout occurs when you have taught the same things so many times to students who don't care, that you don't care anymore either. "The following are examples of teachers' perceptions of the causes of burnout:

1)There's no meaningful personal challenge with teaching. There is no suitable reward system. Pay is okay, but worst of all is the feeling of not having made any significant impact on the students. When the same error is made again and again due to carelessness, when little pride is taken...when simple directions are not followed - causing you and others more work - all of these things add to the level of frustration.

2)[There is] frustration because of lack of positive reinforcement from all sources (administration, parents, students, and colleagues). People take us for granted and don't realize how important our education system is

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and how well it works. There is a definite lack of immediate rewards in teaching. It's not like business where you can see a sale or profit.

The five most frequent causes of burnout reported by this sample were:

1)lack of administrative support,

2)lack of parental and community support,

3)overwhelming workload (large classes, too much paper work, and not enough preparation time),

4)students that are not motivated to learn, and

5)discipline problems.

Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) have also identified these as sources of teacher stress.

The four most frequent strategies suggested by teachers to decrease burnout were:

1)develop a positive relationship with the administration,

2)decrease the workload,

3)receive more parental and community support, and

4)develop effective discipline procedures.

The desire to develop a positive relationship with the administration is reflected by the following comment of one teacher:

"More respect, cooperation, and support from the administration would help greatly. They [the administration] want professionalism from their teaching staff, but they don't want to treat them as professionals - with support, cooperation, and respect [that is] needed

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and deserved. They want discipline and order, but do not want to back up the teachers who carry through with stated policies. They want high academic achievement, but they will not support efforts by teachers who conscientiously set and demand high standards in their grading."

When asked to name the causes of burnout and suggestions for decreasing it, teachers could choose to respond with more than one answer. Therefore, the responses that were reported above to these two questions are not mutually exclusive.

Conclusion

To highlight the major findings, we would like to say that first, since there were no significant relationships between demographic characteristics and MBI subscale scores, we suggest that demographic characteristics alone, such as length of time one remains in the profession, are not accurate predictors of burnout. But, burnout might predict who will leave the profession, as evidenced by the significant correlations between intent to leave and MBI subscale scores. This supports other research (Bard, 1979; Maslach & Jackson, 1979,1982) that found MBI scores were highly predictive of intention to quit one's job. However, this hypothesis needs further investigation in order to determine the relationship between the intent to leave and actual resignation.

Schwab (1983) has pointed out that the research to date indicates that burnout can be related to individual, as well as situational factors. Therefore, Schwab stresses the importance of

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developing strategies to alleviate burnout at both the institutional and the individual levels. Only then can we begin to solve the problem of burnout.

There are many ideas about how to cope with, or reduce feelings of burnout, but no concrete evidence as to what actually works and what does not (Maslach & Jackson, 1981a). The long-term effectiveness of any intervention is not easy to assess, primarily because it requires longitudinal research (Maslach & Jackson, 1981a). However, there are some suggestions that might reduce feelings of burnout. At the individual level, our results, as well as Maslach's (1976), suggest that expressing one's feelings about their job may lead to a reduction in feelings of burnout. Maslach (1976) also suggests that obtaining a social suppport system can be used by professionals to reduce the amount of personal stress. Other suggestions for dealing with burnout are engaging in physical exercise (Freudenberger, 1974, 1975; Maslach, 1976; Truch, 1980), taking regualar vacations (Maslach, 1976), taking breaks, such as going to the park or meditating (Maslach, 1978), separating one's work life from one's private life (Maslach, 1978), and having a proper diet (Truch, 1980).

At the present time, systematic research that examines the effectiveness of strategies to combat job stress at the organizational level is lacking (Schwab, 1983). However, some suggestions that might help at the institutional level are reducing the amount of clients one works with, taking work breaks (Maslach, 1978; Pines & Maslach, 1980), limit the number of hours one works with a single individual, and utilizing volunteers to reduce the work load (Freudenberger, 1974, 1975).

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Burnout can have serious consequences. It is linked to job turnover, absenteeism, low morale, an increased use of drugs and alcohol, marital conflict, and suicide (Maslach, 1976, 1978; Maslach & Jackson, 1981a, 1981b; Pines & Maslach, 1980). Burnout can also lead to a deterioration in the quality of service given by people who suffer from burnout (Freudenberger, 1974, 1975; Maslach, 1976, 1978; Maslach & Jackson, 1981a, 1981b; Pines & Maslach, 1980; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). Given these unfavorable consequences of burnout, it is important that further research be conducted to both identify factors that influence burnout and to develop ameliorative strategies to reduce and possibly prevent the occurrence of burnout among school teachers.

This study has identified the causes of burnout and ameliorative strategies, as teachers perceive them. However, longitudinal studies need to be conducted to further investigate the causes of burnout and to design and implement strategies to combat it. Once the strategies have been designed and implemented, they must also be evaluated. Future research must also develop ways to accurately assess teachers' job satifaction. It is important for teachers to feel good about themselves, their students, and the system in which they work, so that they may provide the quality education that is needed by today's youth.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN SECONDARY TEACHING

Please complete the following survey. It will take approximately 10-15 minutes. Please answer honestly. Your responses will be confidential.

_____ Age _____ Years experience in teaching (exclude student teaching)

_____ Sex _____ Department you teach in (e.g., English, Math, etc.,)

_____ Education (e.g., B.S. plus 30 hours, Masters plus 10 hours, etc.,)

[At this point, teachers completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).]

Now please answer the following questions.

1. Have you ever seriously considered leaving the teaching profession?

   yes _____ no _____

   a. If yes, how often? (circle one number)

1	2	3	4	5	6
a few times a year	once a month	a few times a month	once a week	a few times a week	every day

   b. If yes, why haven't you left? (briefly)

2. Would you leave the profession right now if you had another job to go to?

   yes _____ no _____

3. What do you think are some of the causes of occupational stress in your profession?

4. What do you think would help decrease occupational stress in your profession?

5. Do you have negative feelings about your job?

yes _____ sometimes _____ no _____

If you answered "yes" or "sometimes" to the above question, please answer the following questions. If you answered "no", please go on to number six.

a. Do you think your colleagues experience the same feelings?

yes _____ no _____

b. Do you share (talk about) these feelings with your colleagues?

yes _____ no _____

c. Do you feel you are a "bad" person to have such feelings?

yes _____ no _____

6. Describe what the term "teacher burnout" means to you.